

how it is that the inflation index is so modest when everything costs more, whether it is milk, whether it is electric, whether it is housing, whether it is prescription drugs, whether it is school, whether it is college and university tuition.

I am reluctant to talk about my age, but since the days the distinguished chairman of the Committee on Appropriations and I were in college, the tuitions have become such an expensive proportion of a family's income that it is hard to imagine how working people can get their kids into college and not have them drowning in debt by the time they finish.

That is life in America today. No matter where you turn, it costs more. Look at ball game tickets. Look at theater tickets. Look at the pleasant amenities, see how much they cost, and one can understand why few people can afford to take advantage of these things. As a consequence, most Americans agree that this Nation is headed in the wrong direction. Who can blame them?

We saw the Government's bungling and ineptitude in response to Hurricane Katrina. The administration's missteps in Iraq are costing Americans dearly in lives and dollars, and gasoline prices are out of control.

Gas prices have gone through the roof. This chart shows in December of 2001, President Bush's first year in office, the national average price of gas was \$1.06 for regular gas, \$1.25 for supreme gas. Now we are at a much different point, \$1.06 for regular has gone to \$2.92, almost a \$1.85 increase in the price. That is almost a 200-percent jump in price from 2001 when supreme was \$1.25. Supreme now is \$3.07.

It is unconscionable. The American people are upset. Members are receiving e-mail messages, phone calls. Our constituents will tell Members what they think of these prices.

Gas prices were low in 2001 when two oil men in the White House got together with their friends and the oil industry. They convened a secret task force to develop an energy policy. Then our friends, the Republicans in the Congress, passed the so-called Energy bill which was mostly a bunch of giant tax breaks for big oil and the wealthiest among us. They did not construct that, but that is what happened.

What is the result of all this work by the Bush-Cheney administration and the Republican majority in the Congress? The average price of gasoline this week, as I said, is \$2.92 for the lowest octane.

What is the Republican answer to this problem? How about this: Give everyone a \$100 tax rebate. Whoopee. What a celebration, 100 bucks. If you have a 20-gallon tank in your car, you get 2.5 fills before using your \$100. In fact, the average family cost in gasoline today is up \$1,800. Everyone knows this is a silly idea when they hear it. With gasoline prices at this rate, what is \$100 going to do? Practically nothing;

\$100 is not going to do anything as long as the Republican Party is a subsidiary of big oil.

Here is an example. To pay for the \$100 rebates, the Republican Party, the Republican majority said they will close tax loopholes that oil companies enjoy. But the oil companies said: Wait a minute, don't get tough with us. So today we hear the Republicans have backed off that plan, holding their heads in wonderment like scolded schoolchildren.

We all know about the obscene retirement package that former ExxonMobil CEO Lee Raymond received. His retirement package—get this—was almost \$400 million. When they recalculated his earnings over the period of time he served, his average income was \$145,000 each and every day. How many people in this country earn over \$145,000 a year, no less per day? It is incomprehensible. And the public has been justifiably outraged by this outlandish compensation package at the expense of the American people.

Listen to what the now-ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson said on the "Today Show" this morning. I heard it. He was asked if his company would offer his fellow Americans some relief this summer and discount gasoline prices. His answer was: "We are in the business to make money." He said that was his job.

I was CEO of a pretty big company, and I understand the business world. But when you deal in a commodity you have to be cognizant of your ethical and civic responsibilities to your country. Gasoline is not some run-of-the-mill product. It is vital to our entire society. It is critical. ExxonMobil is part of the American community and its neighbors are suffering. Businesses and American families are having real problems just affording gasoline. There are families who may decide not to go to the doctor this week for a sick child. They may postpone it. Small businesses are losing lots of money with higher fuel costs.

Big oil needs to recognize the impact their commodity has on everyday Americans' lives. Mr. Tillerson, the CEO of ExxonMobil, needs to understand their special role in our functioning as a society.

And the Bush administration needs to stop acting helpless. President Bush and Vice President CHENEY often say: There is not much we can do about high gasoline prices. I do not see it that way. There are things they can do.

There is something we can do here. We can get tough with the Saudis and get rid of their OPEC cartel. The OPEC oil cartel has one purpose—to keep oil prices high by restricting exports or output. Their activity is a blatant violation of the GATT agreement, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

Not only is the President not getting tough with the Saudis, the administration is pandering to them. A year ago, when gasoline prices had already

spiked well past \$2 a gallon, the Saudi ruler visited the President at his ranch in Texas. What we saw was not the President getting tough but, instead, being very friendly, strolling through a flower garden with the Saudi leader. It looked like a friendly gathering, not a tough negotiation.

Then, last week, President Bush's Energy Secretary traveled to an OPEC nation in the Middle East and praised the oil cartel. And this week, with the Saudi Oil Minister here in DC, the administration is putting down the red carpet and telling the Saudis and OPEC what a great job they do.

What the President should do is tell the Saudis, point blank: Disband your OPEC cartel or we will file a complaint against you in the World Trade Organization.

Under international law, OPEC is an illegal cartel aimed at keeping oil prices high. We need to force the Saudis and their friends to play by the rules. And that means no cartel. Forget about it.

Mr. President, I say this: The next time the Saudis or one of the countries in the cartel has a problem with a belligerent neighbor, they should not dial 911 because there will not be anybody to answer that phone, not if they continue the pattern of behavior they have started.

To the President: The American people have had enough. They want a change in leadership in this country. We need leaders who will stand up to the Saudis and the big oil companies. It is one of the only ways we can get oil and gasoline prices under control.

We have to hunt for other sources of energy, for other ways to use the energy. We are seeing it now in hybrid cars. We are seeing now that in Brazil almost 75 percent of the people there are using an ethanol mixture, saving substantial—substantial—amounts of oil. And we have to be creative. We have the genius in this country. Why don't we turn it loose and make sure they have the incentives, the economic incentives, the market incentives to do those things that can save oil?

I do not hear anybody saying, I do not hear the President of the United States saying—and I have not heard it in a long time—join in the sacrifice. We are at war. Join in conservation. We do not have enough. Help this country get through this crisis. And let the oil companies know the American people are in charge, not they. But that message is not sounded. The alarm is not rung. And that is the way life is here.

I make this plea to the President of the United States and colleagues here: Step up to the plate. Really take an action to get that price reduced and not be satisfied with excuses like: Oh, that is the marketplace. Baloney; that is what the American people will tell you. They do not want to drain their limited resources out the window by these outrageous prices for gasoline.